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ABSTRACT

Linguistics has developed as an isolated discipline, while language has historically been the central subject of education. Linguistics need to begin contributing to the general understanding of language by developing courses for the non-specialist. A course conducted by the author for non-majors is outlined. The title of the course was "Language and Society," with two areas of study emphasized: (1) a linguistic analysis of the most general aspects of phonology (e.g., sounds and sound classes) and syntax (e.g., types of transformations); and (2) a sociolinguistic consideration of variation in speech, de-emphasizing the existence of a superior dialect. The tools of instruction for the course were a compiled reading list, as opposed to a linguistics text, films, and the highly developed use of the computer. The object of instruction was to teach the complexity of language variants, as related by similar underlying principles. The means used to teach this duality was that of examining language variants, such as advertising language, slang, Black English, literary language, systems of names in different languages, and variations in gestures. The result of the course was that the students received an accurate understanding of language, and consequently, linguistics was used as a tool to contribute to the education system and society. (LG)

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Teaching Linguistics to Non-Linguistics Majors

W. P. Lehmann

Linguistics has been a rather isolated discipline. Instruction has been carried on largely at the graduate level and designed for producing further specialists. Taught at only a few universities several decades ago linguistics soon developed a tightly concentrated program of courses, and these in turn have come to be highly specialized. While specialists in the field identified themselves as linguists a decade ago, today they use more restricted labels like sociolinguist, psycholinguist, even syntactician or phonologist. Such concentration leading to ever reduced specializations, has brought with it various problems, the most painful of which may result from the stringent job market; however important our discipline and however large our university systems, the number of positions for typologists, experimental phoneticians and other highly specialized professionals will be small.

On the other hand, language—the object of concern for linguistics—has been the central subject in educational programs since the first student sat at the other end of a log. In the medieval period, grammar, rhetoric and logic made up the trivium--the initial part of a student's program of courses. Even in our day the language arts, which replaced two of the three R's, have not yet

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been eliminated by courses in driving, sex education and the like. If our concern is language, linguists should also contribute to this central component of our educational system. One of our aims, as Leonard Bloomfield noted in the first issue of the journal of the Linguistic Society, should be accomplishment of our responsibilities in the broad area he called "Linguistics and the Public Interest."

We may fulfill some of these responsibilities by beginning to concern ourselves more actively with courses for the non-specialist. The major expansion of linguistic training during the next decade will most likely be such courses, which will be introduced increasingly in universities, colleges, junior colleges and even high schools.

If we plan such courses we must consider their focus and their content. I suggest that the focus be indicated by the course title I selected: Language and Society. The title implies that such a course be almost equally divided between attention to a linguistic approach to the study of language and discussion of the purposes which language meets in society.

We must also consider the role and aims of the instructor and the assignments for the student. Since we are aiming to make the course palatable as well as informative, we must use all the pedagogical devices at our command, films, slides, discussion groups,

and probably most effective, the computer. Moreover, students should be involved in linguistic problems that are real to them, not in academic exercises. All of these proposals involve hazards, as I will indicate on the basis of my experience with the preparation of such a course this last year and its presentation this year. To save time, I have reproduced the syllabus for the course and will discuss problems I encountered in the three facets noted above: course content, role of the instructor, role of the student.

Since linguistics has seemed formidable, almost forbidding, I selected down-to-earth titles for the topics of the weekly class programs, and for the lectures. Some of these may seem frivolous to the withdrawn academician; in such matters everyone must follow his own tastes. But I might mention that one of the least academic titles--Milne's "Why don't you spleak painly?"--led a non-linguistics major to look into child language, for he had been reading the Pooh stories to his children.

More seriously, one must decide how much to teach about language and current linguistic approaches to it. In making such a decision we must remember that Junior High School texts and Senior High School texts deal with transformations in their English courses. Accordingly our students will have encountered transformational

grammar, whether well or badly presented, whether understood by them or by their teacher. Not surprisingly, at least to anyone teaching languages or linguistics, the earlier courses seem to lead to little comprehension. Accordingly one must make a judgment whether sociolinguistic discussions are to be based on a poor understanding of linguistics and language, or whether a rapid introduction to a linguistic analysis of language is to make up the first part of the course.

I decided to use almost half of the course to present a linguistic analysis. In this part of the course I repeatedly told the students that I am not aiming to make them into linguists. I did however insist that they learn to transcribe—with happy results. Students who had taken a number of courses in linguistics, even a semester course in phonetics, learned with great satisfaction in a few weeks how to write English in accordance with a phonemic transcription. We will hear more about the autonomous phoneme later. If anyone considers the approach obsolete, I suggest that he look at the recent publications of William Labov, or examine some of the studies of experimental phoneticians, like Victoria Fromkin, or note the remarkable findings of investigators of aphasia, like Hanna Ulatowska. Phonology, like language in any of its components, is not

a simple system. Accordingly, in our scientific statements we would not present the phonological component of language as totally independent of the other components. But an introductory course in linguistics has other problems. We must divest our students of the notion that spelling represents what they say. We also do them a favor when we equip them with an understanding of sounds and sound-classes which will help them better to understand their problems in learning a second language.

Syntax, by contrast, is simple and entertaining for most students, possibly the most pleasant contribution of transformational grammar. Anyone can diagram a simple sentence like: It's easy. Something pleases John. Anyone can also draw a tree for such sentences. We run into problems, however, when we want students to diagram sentences like:

John is easy to please.

John is eager to please.

By contrast with the problems encountered in diagramming such sentences, drawing trees for the "kernels" is just as simple, whether the sentences are high or low in the tree. Students take to the drawing of trees with great alacrity. They become impatient, however, when the transformations are presented in inordinate

detail. Accordingly one must avoid the temptation of the uncertain to show off. One must also avoid the pedant's love of obscure terms, though oddly some students seem amused by current linguistic jargon--terms like gapping, tough-movement and the like. Mastery of such terms is however no more essential to an understanding of language than mastery of terms every linguist used to know, like the names of the various laws which entrepreneurs in contemporary jargon might well have difficulties discussing: Thurneysen's law, or Porson's, or the several laws celebrating the name of Sievers.

Focussing on language rather than linguistics, not to speak of arcane linguistics, also has important implications for choice of textbooks. I know of no single textbook for a course entitled: Language and Society; accordingly, I simply made out a reading list without requiring the purchase of any text. You may propose other textbook selections, or point out preferences. I will give briefly my reasons for not including three books that may seem well-suited for such a course. Langacker's Language and its Structure (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968) one of the most widely used elementary texts, seems to me too greatly concerned with accounting for linguistics, rather than explicating it or discussing language. Wardhaugh's Introduction to Linguistics (New York:

McGraw-Hill, 1972) strikes me as workmanly, but too involved in details rather than principles. Chomsky's simplest book in my estimation, Language and Mind (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, enlarged edition 1972) is to my surprise too difficult at this level.

Other materials for the course, such as films, could also be discussed at length. The MLA-CAL films are excellent, but should be brought up to date. Still, they give a graphic presentation of certain topics which an instructor finds hard to equal with his chalk and blackboard, or his overhead projector, or even a computer.

The most distinctive feature of my own course is the use of the computer. Its facilities, as well as assistants and programmers, have been made available by Project C-BE, which I would like to credit here, as well as its principal investigators, John J. Allan III and Joseph J. Lagowski.* Students have been greatly impressed with their computer modules, even students with a humanistic bent who were very skeptical of the machine. Seated at their computer terminals, students receive direct and intensive instruction that is hard to equal. I have no doubt that in a few years many courses in the humanities and social sciences will be computer-based, as also in the physical sciences and engineering. But there are hazards.

Among the most troublesome for the lordly instructor are the constraints imposed by a temperamental machine. You can't talk to it, yet; it only obeys programs. You thus must talk to the programmer; but he too doesn't really control the machine--he works with it. Programs have their limitations; materials must therefore be devised which the programmer, the programs and the machine will accept. The machine has a restricted memory, and other limitations; moreover, it may collapse for numbers of reasons. Still, the computer gives students guided instruction in such matters as the derivation of sentences, and they can work at their own speed--the course can be self-paced. Unless one sits at a terminal, however, visualization of the possibilities may be difficult, even from pictures of individual sequences on the CRT. The possibilities however are so encouraging that in my opinion our educational institutions will soon have computerized instruction at all levels; and the same capabilities will shortly thereafter be available for television sets in the home.

But there are problems. One problem results from opinions on how the computer should be used. By one view the computer with its CRT and other terminals will take over the role of all teaching materials: textbook, blackboard, film, and virtually even

the instructor. By another view, the computer should be used for only those purposes which cannot be as capably managed with the help of films, slides, xeroxes, dittoed materials, and the like. This second view, under which the course has been prepared, labels all ineffective uses of the computer as page-turning. I can't really define page-turning; but I can tell you that it's an unpardonable defect, something like leprosy in Biblical days, or like perjury in political life before the term "inoperative" was adopted. Because of page-turning propensities we suffered various traumas in working up the course; the objectors to one early proposed module may well have been correct, because well-prepared films are indeed excellent for teaching phonetics and phonology. If support continues, we will try to prepare phonological modules which do a better job of involving students in phonological study than do films, even a compelling film like that illustrating the movements of the articulatory organs of a speaker, a part of whose cheek had been surgically removed.

We also hope we may at sometime have ample computer memory so that our grammatical descriptions are not modified, or determined by the available hardware. Our current syntactic description is comparable to the grammar of Chomsky's Syntactic Structures of 1957 rather than that of Aspects of 1965, let alone a later analysis.

I may still mention that the adjustment of grammatical descriptions to computer possibilities is an exhilarating intellectual exercise which dispels any notion that elementary presentations of linguistics and language analysis lack challenge. I hope that the energies of many instructors will come to be involved in such problems, for in this way we may hope for improved solutions in teaching the problems encountered in linguistics. Respect for man and for the capabilities of the human mind will not be diminished by such activities.

I have spent most of our time on the linguistic problems rather than the sociolinguistic problems. In a sense these are less difficult to handle, except again for the need to restrict the topics for pedagogical effectiveness. My suggestions for term papers may illuminate my aims in the course.

We have selected bilingualism as the topic for teaching students to understand and accept variation in speech. This is one of the greatest problems facing educators at present. It is frightening to hear of university instructors who label variations from some proposed standard as inferior; the proposed standard is generally their own. Such an uninformed position on the use of language in society is as devestating as is the treatment of Mexican Spanish, Chicano English, Black English and other variant forms of language as inferior.

I might add that the contrasting view, that "anything goes" or that in the literal sense "you should leave your language alone," shows a similar misunderstanding of communication in society, and betrays similar deficiencies in the education of its proponents. Yet it is not so humanly and socially destructive as is the deprecation of the speech of another person, especially a child.

A few minutes are totally inadequate for discussing some of the most highly complex problems of contemporary society. Since time is short, I will simply state that the devastating effects resulting from downgrading speakers of Black, Chicano, German, Italian, Portuguese or whatever variants of English result not because their speakers have difficulties with so-called standard English, but because human beings in positions of authority, such as teachers, indicate that the variants in which a child expresses itself normally are inferior. To convey to students in the course a notion of the complexity of language, and yet of the similar principles underlying all forms of language we will examine variants such as advertising language, slang, especially student slang, variations of "language according to uses" as in Black English, variations "according to use," such as literary language, systems of names in different languages, and variations in gestures. Here too we can only deal with carefully selected topics. We would like to illustrate that just as advertising language, or literary language, makes use of certain rules, so does

for example Black English.

Every speaker of English, deletes forms of BE when introducing adjectives. Thus the following sentence is derived by a transformation involving the deletion of the copula and a relative pronoun:

The students exemplary in carrying out their experiments were given scholarships.

This sentence is based on an underlying string which in fuller form would yield:

The students who were exemplary in carrying out their experiments were given scholarships.

And if adjectives such as 'exemplary' are not accompanied by a modifier, we say:

The exemplary students were given scholarships.

Every speaker of English produces utterances hundreds of times a day involving this transformation.

A speaker of Black English applies a BE deletion transformation in additional patterns when he says:

She wow! for "She is wild."

He gon' try to get up. for "He is going to try to get up."

We hope that in observing the variation of such transformations,

and in the application of linguistic processes like deletion, whether by means of a transformational framework or some other grammatical approach, students will achieve an accurate understanding of language, the understanding one would hope to find in anyone claiming to be educated. If the achievements of linguistics can be applied in this way, linguistics will make great contributions to our educational system and to our society. Carrying out such aims will also give linguistics, and linguists, a great deal to do.

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